



Representative Lamar, Senator Cohen and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee.

My name is Jim Gildea, and I am the Chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council. I am offering written testimony IN SUPPORT OF:

RAISED BILL NUMBER 1079

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT COMMUTER RAIL COUNCIL.

I offer testimony in support of **Raised Bill 1079** because as Chair of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council, we have developed a legislative agenda from the perspective of the day-to-day rail commuter. I would like to build on a few key points within the raised bill.

With regards to the Shore Line East, this is the only branch or line that has been not brought back to pre-Covid service levels. Although ridership will be cited as the reason, it's important to know all other lines were brought back to 100% without that same increase in ridership requirement.

Subsidies are also cited as a reason why the line should not receive its full schedule attainment. I feel this is tremendously misleading for several reasons. First, this subsidy they cite is based on this reduced ridership which is a reduced ridership they do nothing to increase. Certainly, and unequivocally one of the best ways to lower the subsidy level of that line is to attract more riders. By making the line more attractive to commuters and getting them to use it as they had pre Covid would in fact reduce subsidies.

Another issue, and perhaps more importantly, we live in a society where government subsidizes a fair amount of our daily life. That comes in the form of public education, trash collection, police protection, fire protection, paid family medical, leave act, Medicare, Medicaid, roads and highways and so on. Very rarely does anybody question the subsidy amounts of so many helpful programs we offer. It is done, simply because it is good government. Public transportation is no different. We have an obligation to provide quality public transportation. The only time subsidies are ever mentioned, when discussing government, is when bureaucrats don't want to offer a service. Plain and simple.

The Council also would like to reinforce our belief that we should continue to offer fair free busing. As mentioned above, providing public transportation is a great way in which to make the state of Connecticut a more competitive place to live and work. We have seen fare free bussing and what it has done for ridership numbers. We think this is a great compliment to our rail advocacy efforts by providing a strong first and last mile alternative for rail commuters.

This bill also requests administrative help in helping us carry out our duties and responsibilities. We feel we have proven to be an effective body. That effectiveness comes with a cost. Some of the costs that we incur amongst ourselves are postage, website hosting, e-mail platform charges, equipment in which to conduct meetings, etc. These costs currently are all paid for by the individual members of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council.

Finally, similar to the language in bill Proposed House Bill 5508 requesting new rail cars for the Waterbury Branch, we feel that new rail cars for both the Waterbury Branch and Danbury Branch, is an important investment to make in public transportation. The Waterbury branch and Danbury branch commuters sit on the oldest cars in the fleet. In many cases there are more than 40 years old. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars modernizing those lines, putting signals on the line, installing passing sidings on the line, enhancing schedules and making commuting more attractive. Those contributions have been amazing but at the end of the day, one unaddressed component of modernizing those lines is upgrading the 40 year old cars that the commuters on those lines use.

Jim Gildea
Chairman, Connecticut Commuter Rail Council